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ABSTRACT

A study examined the attitudes of a group of 66 fifth and eighth graders in four classes in an intermediate school located in rural southeast Louisiana toward a set of traditional sex role-typed occupations. Age (grade level) did not appear to influence students' attitudes toward the interrelationship of sex and occupational choice. Furthermore, there did not appear to be any significant differences between the sexes with regard to generalized attitudes toward traditional male, traditional female, and sex-neutral occupations. Those students surveyed appeared to be relatively open and nonconservative when asked about the relation between sex and career choice for others as an abstract, generalized body; however, there was evidence that deeper attitudes, reflected by self-efficacy beliefs, led students of both sexes to be more traditional when contemplating their own future jobs. It was recommended that similar research be conducted with older student populations to see whether these attitudes persist. (MN)

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Attitudes of 5th and 8th Grade Students Toward Traditional Sex-Role Typed Occupations

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A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Biloxi, Mississippi, November, 1985.

Attitudes toward jobs are developed at a very early age. Garrett, Ein, and Tremaine (1977) reported that first graders have the most stereotyped view of jobs. In the same study, fifth graders were the least biased toward adult occupations. Although these attitudes were less biased than the first graders, the childrens' views expressed were conservative in nature. In addition, boys exhibited more stereotyped views than girls.

In a related study of elementary students' attitudes toward job stereotyping, Scheresky (1976) reported that "children viewed occupations as the role of one sex or the other, according to traditional sex-typed views"(p. 1207). Again, the evidence indicates a strong sex-stereotyping view of jobs by elementary students regardless of age or sex.

Gregg and Dobson (1980) reported similar results with elementary school students on their views of traditional occupations. The findings indicated "boys express more interest in traditionally male careers, but the girls express more interest in traditionally female careers"(p. 73). Even though the students were aware of a broad range of occupations (18 different occupations were used in the study), their job interest selection was very narrow and traditional.

Additional research (Crow and Taebel, 1976) reported a strong stereotyped view of occupations by elementary students. The study examined the attitudes of sixth grade students toward 50 different jobs. Results indicated that a majority of subjects "still see most occupations and activities as appropriate for either men or for women rather than for both sexes"(p.363).

Corkern, Blount, Gorrell, and McDonald (1984) reported that females in the eighth grade are less stereotyped toward traditional male occupations than eighth grade males. But at the same time, "females were less certain than males that they could learn the skills necessary to perform traditional male roles"(p. 1). Also in the study, similar results were found concerning jobs classified as being neutral. Overall, results indicate that "females may have less stereotyped thinking in adolescence while males become more stereotyped"(p. 2).

Accompanying the reported research on stereotyped attitudes on traditional jobs, has been research on methods to help reduce students' perceptions and views on job stereotyping. Vincenzi (1977) reported a method of reducing the stereotype views of elementary students. In the treatment, students viewed magazine articles on stereotyping, held discussions regarding various job stereotypes, and had guest female speakers who held traditional male occupations. The results of this treatment were a significant reduction of stereotype responses from students.

Additional strategies for dealing with job stereotyping, have been suggested by Gregg and Dobson (1980). These strategies include utilization of innovative and nontraditional models of various occupations, presentation of nonsexist career education and curriculum materials, encouragement of parents to examine their own sex role conditioning, and utilization of nonsexist school programs which portray men and women in nontraditional careers. These strategies are appropriate for elementary, middle, and high schools.

In the reported research concerning existing attitudes and strategies for changing stereotyped attitudes, students have had to communicate their feelings in some kind of manner. Attitudes have been measured in a variety of ways such as questionnaires, interviews, or viewing people actually doing various occupations. Generally, students have been asked to respond to three categories of jobs: traditional female, traditional male, and neutral. Studies (Garrett, et al., 1977; Corkern, et al., 1984) indicate that elementary school students are capable of distinguishing their job preferences and their perceptions of their abilities to learn how to perform these jobs.

Prior research evidence indicates that young students are capable of responding to questions dealing with stereotyped jobs, but the evidence has been mixed regarding whether childrens views become more conservative and traditonal with age or whether they become less conservative. This disparity formed the basis for the current study.

The researchers determined to provide 3 scales related to job attitudes, each scale measuring different levels of beliefs, from the most generalized, abstract level to the most personal. It was believed that such scales would provide more thorough knowledge about the range of attitudes. It was hypothesized that older males would exhibit more traditional occupational attitudes and older females would exhibit less traditional attitudes.

Method

Subjects

Students enrolled in the fifth and eighth grades at an intermediate school in rural southeast Louisiana during the 1984-85 school year were subjects in this study. Four classes were assigned to the treatment. The students were from English, social studies, and science classes.

Instrument

Attitudes toward traditional sex-role typed occupations were determined by an attitude measure. This attitude measure was developed based upon previous research (Garrett, et al., 1977; Corkern, et al., 1984). Both studies used an attitude measure in which students responded to questions concerning sex-role typed occupations, categorized as being male, female, or neutral. Garrett et al. (1977) used a modified version of the SRA Occupation Kit (Science Research Associates, Inc., 1964) involving 40 occupations. Corkern et al. (1984) modified the Garrett measure in format and number of items.

The current attitude measure consisted of 24 Likert scale items. The items were keyed to jobs as to whether they were traditionally female, male, or neutral. The 24 items dealt with attitudes toward various sex-role typed jobs ranging from lower middle-class occupations to upper middle-class occupations. The jobs ranged from traditional jobs, such as a bus driver, to newer jobs, such as a computer programmer. Eight of the items were identified as traditionally-female oriented jobs, eight as

traditionally-male oriented jobs, and eight as being neutral (See Appendix A).

Procedure

The subjects responded to three versions of the measure. They were asked which kinds of people are able to do these jobs (occupational attitudes), if they would like to do these jobs if they had the chance (job preference), and if they could learn to do the things these people do in their jobs (self-efficacy beliefs). The measure took 45 minutes to administer. The students (n=66) were administered the attitude measure on three different occasions within a week's time.

Results

Analyses of variance procedures were applied to the 2x2 (grade level by sex) fixed factor design specified for this study. The SPSSX program (SPSS, Inc., 1983) was selected for analysis of the data gathered in this study.

Analyses revealed a significant main effect between sexes dealing with attitudes toward learning traditional jobs. ANOVAs performed on the variables revealed significant differences in the males' responses to "learning male jobs", $F(1,57)=14.96$, $p<.000$, and in the females' responses to "learning female jobs", $F(1,60)=49.68$, $p<.000$. Males said they could learn traditional male jobs significantly more than did females. The same holds true for female responses to traditional female jobs.

Additional ANOVAs on student responses related to job preferences revealed significant differences between sexes,

$F(1,54)=6.79, p<.012$. Males indicated greater preferences for male jobs than did females.

No other significant effects were obtained among grade levels and sexes in the variables dealing with "learning neutral jobs," "liking female jobs," "liking neutral jobs," "who can do male jobs," and "who can do neutral jobs."

Discussion

Results from this study indicate that there are differences between the sexes in their attitudes toward traditional sex-role-typed occupations. If we consider responses to each section of the questionnaire to be related to an overall attitudinal set, we can see that, while there is some evidence for at least nominal departures from traditional and conservative occupational attitudes, some deeper attitudinal elements do reveal more traditional orientations. Taken as a cluster of generalized and personalized attitudes, responses to the instrument provide evidence for a range of traditional and non-traditional attitudes.

Occupational attitudes in terms of abstract, generalized others ("who can do these jobs?") appear to be relatively open and non-conservative. There is limited support for non-traditional attitudes with regard to personal preferences ("would you like to do these jobs?"), and strong evidence of traditional attitudes with regard to personal effiacy or ability concerning sex-typed occupations ("could you learn to do these jobs?"). The fact that there were no grade level differences observed on any of the measures suggests that age is not an influential factor in male

and female occupational attitudes in late elementary and middle school.

It is interesting to note that there were no significant differences between sexes or grades on the variable related to generalized attitudes toward traditional male, traditional female, and neutral occupations. While other studies indicate that children hold quite stereotyped views of jobs (Gregg & Dobson, 1980; Scheresky, 1976), the results obtained in this study do not. Inspection of the means shows that there were no strong feelings exhibited by the students as to whether one job was restricted to one or another sex. While students shifted away from the middle of the scales for male and female jobs, these shifts still approximate a middle position. Thus, there is some evidence for job stereotyping on this measure among the students. Table 1 shows the means for each response by sex.

Insert Table 1 about here

The finding of a significant difference between male and female students regarding whether they would like to do certain jobs shows that males exhibit greater preferences for traditional male occupations than do females. This split in the attitudes of the male and female students follows a traditional line, but it is not mirrored in female preferences for traditional female jobs. In fact, concerning male jobs, the female responses cluster

closely around the middle of the scale, indicating no strong feelings regarding male occupations, while the male attitudes are more associated with the positive end of the scale, showing stronger preferences toward those traditional male jobs. Likewise, a similar pattern is found for males clustering around the middle values regarding female occupations and females shifting toward the positive end of the scale.

Both male and female students exhibited feelings concerning their abilities to learn traditional male and female jobs. These differences are associated with self-efficacy beliefs -- confidence that they personally could learn the skills associated with the occupations. Males indicated that they believe that they could learn traditional male jobs more than did females; similarly, females indicated that they believed they learn female jobs more than did males. These feelings of self-efficacy may be viewed as sets of feelings or attitudes regarding traditional occupations existing at a deeper or more central level than beliefs about others and preferences for certain occupations.

It is one thing to say that there is no difference related to sex in who can do certain jobs, but it is another thing to put oneself into the position of anticipating learning the skills of those jobs. In the latter case, feelings of personal adequacy related to sex-roles may enter into the deliberations. Males may feel more comfortable with the idea of learning those traditional male occupations, and females feel comfortable with the idea of learning those traditional female occupations. This more personal identification with the jobs belies their stated beliefs about job

appropriateness when considering them in the more abstract fashion of the other parts of the scale.

When considering the results in all three sections of the instrument, it is easy to see that the hypothesis that there would be greater stereotyping of attitudes in older students was not borne out. However, the findings of Corkern et al. (1984) were partially confirmed in the fact that there were self-efficacy belief differences found between males and females, as well as a difference in male and female levels of preference for traditional male occupations.

A tentative conclusion from this study is that the more superficial levels of attitudes toward traditional sex-typed occupations are relatively non-conservative in children at these ages, but that deeper attitudes, reflected by self-efficacy beliefs, maintain more traditional orientations. Whether these attitudes of elementary/middle school students persist into high school is question that deserves to be investigated by researchers. In addition, research should be directed toward older populations, such as graduating college students, to determine if these patterns of attitudes continue past adolescence.

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Appendix A

Jobs

1. Bus Driver
2. Grocery Checker
3. Typist
4. Mail Carrier
5. Telephone Operator
6. Store Manager
7. Salesperson
8. Doctor
9. TV/Radio Announcer
10. Bookkeeper
11. Police Officer
12. Nurse
13. Carpenter
14. Homemaker
15. Teacher
16. Computer Programmer
17. Taxi Driver
18. Professional Athlete
19. Real Estate Agent
20. Librarian
21. Singer
22. Dancer
23. Car Mechanic
24. Veterinarian

Stereotype Jobs

Occupations:	Items:
1. Traditional Female Jobs	3,5,10,12,13,20, 22,23
2. Traditional Male Jobs	2,7,8,11,14,17, 21,24
3. Neutral Jobs	1,4,6,9,15,16, 18,19

Table 1

Means of Male and Female Responses to Sex-Role Stereotyping

Types of Questions	Sex	
	Females	Males
Like Jobs		
Female	22.41	22.59
Male	24.26	20.86
Neutral	23.21	23.74
Can Do Jobs		
Female	28.59	27.42
Male	19.58	18.77
Neutral	23.92	22.60
Learn to Do Jobs		
Female	17.60	27.77
Male	25.76	19.76
Neutral	21.45	22.45